



COUNTRY CASE STUDY  
South Africa



## Building Grassroots Support for Access to a Modern Education

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”  
– Nelson Mandela

## Map of South Africa



### Key Statistics

2011 Population <sup>1</sup>	50,586,757
2010 Gross National Income per Capita <sup>2</sup>	US\$ 6,090
Life Expectancy <sup>3</sup>	52 years
Unemployment Rate <sup>4</sup>	25%
Total Adult Literacy Rate <sup>5</sup>	89%
Official Languages	English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, siSwati, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga
Number of Children in School <sup>6</sup>	12 million in public schools (6 million in primary) 0.4 million in private schools
Number of Schools <sup>7</sup>	25,000 public schools 1,200 private schools
Survival Rate to Last Primary Grade (P7) <sup>8</sup>	77%
Mean Years of Schooling <sup>9</sup>	8.5 years

## Background

While South Africa is ranked by the World Bank as an upper-middle income country and the 28<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world<sup>10</sup>, about a quarter of the population is unemployed and lives on less than \$1.25 a day.<sup>11</sup> This is the legacy of apartheid, the system that brutally segregated and oppressed the country's majority black population from 1948 to 1994. Beginning in 1953 with the Bantu Education Act, South African schools were segregated by race; black schools were systematically geared towards turning out nothing more than manual laborers and domestic servants.

Today's South African government is working hard to reverse the ill effects of apartheid and to provide a robust education for all its citizens. According to the country's Bill of Rights and Constitution, the state has an obligation to make education available and accessible to all citizens.

South Africa spends a larger share (5-6%) of its GDP on education than any other African nation.<sup>12</sup> Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15 (grades 1 to 9) and access to primary education, the UN's second Millennium Development Goal, is now nearly universal.

However, as recently pointed out by Trevor Manuel, South Africa's National Planning Minister, South Africa ranks 137 out of 150 countries in math and science and is one of the bottom 25 performers on the African continent.<sup>13</sup> For the country's black children, particularly those in the black townships and rural areas, schooling remains vastly inferior to the education received by their white peers. As a result, fewer black children achieve the levels of literacy and numeracy required to advance to higher levels of learning. While 65% of whites over 20 years old have a high school or higher education, the figure for blacks is only 14%.<sup>14</sup>

What are the reasons for this stark inequality? There are several and they will likely take decades to overcome. In the mid-1990s a government policy that redistributed teachers among poor performing schools had the unintended consequence of lowering teaching quality in many schools. Furthermore, only 18% of teachers are professionally qualified graduates.<sup>15</sup>

Access to resources is another problem. 80% of state-run schools lack a library. Rural schools suffer from overcrowding, poor infrastructure and lack of reading materials.<sup>16</sup>

With 11 official languages, diversity of language compounds the challenges. The ability to read English, South Africa's primary language of education and commerce, is crucial for success at school and beyond. Yet in places like Soweto and in most township schools where members of every regional ethnic and linguistic group can be found, it's virtually impossible to find teachers who are fluent in both English and in the various home languages.

Recognizing the importance of education to national competitiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in mid-2010, the government announced Schooling 2025, a long-term vision for the basic education sector. This plan specifies monitoring of progress against a set of measurable indicators covering all aspects of basic education including enrollment and retention of students, teachers, infrastructure, school funding, student well-being and school safety, mass literacy and educational quality.

Action Plan 2014 sets out 27 goals to be achieved by all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, principals and administrators – and requires that learning, teaching materials and facilities be of the highest quality.<sup>17</sup>

While government leadership and support are crucial to modernizing education in South Africa, a parallel bottoms-up approach involving communities, the private sector, NGOs and multilateral organizations will be equally necessary to achieving sustainable improvement. Even local grassroots efforts – though small at first – can bubble up, gain momentum and ultimately influence other sectors.

The remainder of this report will focus on one such grassroots effort that is integrating children's laptops into education across South Africa. This initiative began on a very small scale (and is still small in size), but is having a positive impact on the lives of the children and increasingly attracting the interest and attention of the government and the private sector.

## Kliptown

Kliptown is the oldest settlement of the township of Soweto, about 17 km southwest of Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city. Kliptown's population is about 45,000 people – of whom 75-80% are unemployed. HIV-AIDS affects one in three of the residents and 60% of teenage girls are pregnant.

Kliptown has limited access to electricity, water and proper sanitation. There are no health clinics, no Internet access and no schools. The children have to walk 25-30 minutes to schools outside of the settlement. The vast majority of families have great difficulty paying for the costs of school fees, uniforms, books and supplies, which amounts to about US \$100 per year.

Life is very hard in Kliptown but not without hope. In March 2007, Thulani Madondo, a local community organizer, founded the Kliptown Youth Program to bring back hope to the people in this impoverished community and to help raise the standard of living. KYP's stated mission is to "eradicate poverty of mind, body, and soul and to fight against the disadvantages imposed on the children of Kliptown by providing educational support and positive activities to engage in after school. It seeks to develop young and dynamic individuals who are willing to contribute effectively for the betterment of their community."<sup>18</sup>

KYP is an after-school program that runs from 2:30 pm to 5:00-6:00 pm, depending on the season. The children span 8 to 27 years old with the older ones helping out the younger ones. In its first year, there were 80 youths in the program. Today there are over 300 and a staff of 15 people.

Because children can't learn on empty stomachs, KYP has a food program that provides two nutritious meals a day. In the morning the children can eat breakfast at the center or get a bag lunch to take to school. When they arrive at KYP after school, they get another meal before they dig into their studies.

On Monday-Thursday afternoons KYP runs a tutoring program to help primary and secondary school students in math, science and English. While only 1 in 3 of all Kliptown students pass their matriculation ("matric") exams after grade 12, thanks to the tutoring program, almost every single

KYP member has passed the matric. This is an enormous source of pride for the community.

In addition to academics, KYP also offers instruction in the performing arts (dance, music, theatre, cinematography), athletics and in the environment. There are 3 soccer teams and 2 netball teams. A vegetable garden helps members learn about the environment and the role citizens play in protecting and preserving it.

### One Laptop per Child

Thanks to the generosity of an American family in the Boston area, the first 100 XO laptops arrived in Kliptown in March 2008. A technical consultant from the Kofi Annan Center for Excellence in ICT came from Ghana to provide the initial training of KYP staff. The South Africa government donated electronic books and helped implement the process for delivering the materials.

According to Thulani Madondo the first priority was getting people to understand that the XO is not a toy – it is a resource for education. Many children in Kliptown have difficulty learning to read so it is important to get them excited about reading. The children like reading from the XO screen because it makes learning fun and cool. The KYP staff teaches basic IT skills to the children and helps them use the XO to do their homework.



*Children at the Kliptown Youth Program with XO laptops*

The parents are also very excited about KYP and the OLPC program. When the children bring the XO home, some parents bring the laptops to the KYP center the next morning so they can be recharged during the school day and be ready when the children arrive at KYP at 2:30 pm. Today there are 300 XO laptops at KYP.

## The Movement Spreads

From 2008 through 2011, small deployments of XO laptops sprang up across South Africa. None of these deployments were initially connected to one another.

### Soweto

University of Massachusetts students participating in OLPC Corps funded 100 XOs for children in grades 4-6 at the Lilydale Primary School in Soweto. A private donation of an additional 60 laptops was made in late 2011.

*Teacher and students working on the XO in Lesotho*



### Lesotho

Lesotho is a small (about the size of Maryland) country surrounded by South Africa. The terrain is very rugged, there are few roads and many villages are only accessible by foot or horseback. Most of the population engages in subsistence farming and the economy is very fragile and highly dependent on South Africa.

150 XOs arrived in December 2010 and were deployed at the Nohana Primary School in Ketane. Team members went to Kliptown to receive training on the laptops and to observe their use at the Lilydale school in Soweto. Educational activities were uploaded onto all the XO laptops and an HIV/AIDS brochure for children was loaded onto the network server. A small basement room in the school was converted to the generator and power system facility. The team also prepared a guidebook for teachers and parents on how the laptops would be handled. All teachers received three weeks training on how to use and repair the laptops.

Since deployment, school enrollment has risen and the English and math skills of the students have improved.<sup>19</sup>

### Limpopo

Also in 2008, a group at Indiana University funded 300 XOs for three primary schools (Mmaweshi, Katane and Driehoek) in Haenertsburg in Limpopo province. Deployment was also supported by KYP technical staff.

### Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN)

Dating back to 2000, Saint Mark's School of San Rafael, California, formed a partnership with the eSibonisweni Primary School, located in a rural area outside of Durban in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region. The eSibonisweni school has more than 700 students, of whom 150 are AIDS orphans.

Over the years the Saint Marks School has collected and sent over books, learning aids, clothing and shoes; exchanged an annual photo album; and shared letters and illustrations of daily life. In 2008, the school raised enough money to purchase 80 XO laptops for eSibonisweni students.



*Mizper Primary School in Swaziland*

### Swaziland

Private donations have also funded 500 XOs for children at the Maisphula, Mizper and Lomahasha primary schools in Swaziland.

As of early 2012, there are a total of 1,400 XO laptops in South Africa. The Kliptown Youth Program provides technical and training support for all these deployments.

## The Future

During the past three years geographically disparate communities in South Africa and their sponsors from all over the world have joined together to begin to bring a modern education to children who are eager to learn and improve their chances for future success in society. Fundraising to support these deployments has been and continues to be a constant challenge.

The One Laptop per Child Association is working with the private and public sector, NGOs and multilateral organizations to develop a larger scale solution that will more rapidly put laptops into the hands of South Africa's 6 million primary school children.

OLPCA has brought representatives from the private sector to Kliptown to see the laptop program in action. The impact achieved by KYP has strongly impressed these visitors and persuaded them to advocate for greater financial support.

In addition, in September 2011, OLPCA Chairman Rodrigo Arboleda met with President Jacob Zuma to discuss government support. President Zuma has frequently called on all South Africans to work together in support of basic education. He has stated that basic education is a national priority and a societal responsibility nationwide.

What began in 2008 as a glimmer of hope for small and isolated groups of children is on the verge of becoming an opportunity for many more children throughout South Africa. A grassroots approach on its own can't solve the entire problem but it can be the match that ignites a much larger movement.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."

*Students talking with President Jacob Zuma and OLPCA Chairman Rodrigo Arboleda about their XO laptops*



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>South African Government Information Website, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/glance.htm>.
- <sup>2</sup>World Bank Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa>
- <sup>3</sup>World Bank Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa?display=graph>.
- <sup>4</sup><http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-28/south-africa-s-jobless-rate-rises-to-25-7-as-manufacturing-growth-stalls.html>.
- <sup>5</sup>World Bank Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa?display=graph>.
- <sup>6</sup>South African Government Information Website, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/education.htm>.
- <sup>7</sup>South African Government Information Website, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/education.htm>.
- <sup>8</sup>UNICEF, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southafrica\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southafrica_statistics.html).
- <sup>9</sup>UNDP, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ZAF.html>.
- <sup>10</sup>World Bank Data, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_GDP\\_\(nominal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)).
- <sup>11</sup>UN Data, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SOWC&f=inID%3A1>.
- <sup>12</sup>South Africa.info website, <http://www.southafrica.info/about/education/monitoring-070911.htm>.
- <sup>13</sup>South Africa.info website, <http://www.southafrica.info/about/education/monitoring-070911.htm>.
- <sup>14</sup>South Africa.info website, <http://www.southafrica.info/about/education/education.htm>.
- <sup>15</sup>Economist, January 14, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/15270976>.
- <sup>16</sup>Room to Read, <http://www.roomtoread.org/page.aspx?pid=320>.
- <sup>17</sup>South African Government Information, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/education.htm>.
- <sup>18</sup>Kliptown Youth Program website, <http://www.kliptownyouthprogram.org/home>.
- <sup>19</sup>Laptops to Lesotho website, <http://www.laptopstolessoutho.org/laptop.html>.